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The Member will do well to meet the Peishkar and place before him the matters now alleged.

10. *Exemption of blighted cocoanut trees from taxation.*

Mr. Kanakku Kerulan Govindan (Member, Mavelikara Taluk) represented that the cocoanut plantations formed the main, if not the sole, source of income to the land-owners of the low-lying districts of the State. Within the last decade, the cocoanut blight made considerable havoc among the people, and in spite of the anxious attention paid to the subject by Government by the appointment of special officers to investigate the matter and the publication of their reports, the condition of the cocoanut gardens was growing from bad to worse day by day. The impoverishing effect, together with the increasing spread of the blight, ha deprived many families of their means of livelihood. At present, the proverthies of Thekkekara and Pallikkal in Mavelikara taluk, Krishnapuram and Puthupalli in Karunagapalli taluk and Pathiyur in Kartigapalli taluk were materially affected by the disease and the contagion was gradually spreading to the adjacent areas also. In fact, a circular area of 3 or 4 miles' radius, with Kayenculam as the centre, was subject to the infection. Similar areas at Lalam in Meenachil, Kaviyur in Thiruvalla and some places at Alleppey, were also infected, besides many other isolated parts in the above mentioned taluks and Quilon where also the blight had set in. On an average, from 30 to 50 per cent of the trees was affected at the various centres mentioned. When a tree was attacked by the pest, the fruit became gradually reduced in quantity and quality till at last the tree ceased to bear any fruit at all. Even the fruit that were obtained were not good and would not fetch even half the normal price. The leaves and stem of the tree became sapless and dry. In fact, every item of the yield of the affected tree became deteriorated and useless. The pest could not be attributed to any neglect or indifference on the part of the owners. On the other hand, the land-owners of the affected areas were striving their best to prevent and root out the disease and they would be ever ready to co-operate with the Special Officer in experimenting and adopting remedial measures against the palm disease. The Member expressed regret that, in spite of the best endeavours of the Special Officer, there had been no appreciable improvement so far in the condition of the blight, and that, having regard to the magnitude of the infection and the consequent loss to the ryots, he was forced to approach Government, on behalf of the people, with a prayer that some concession might be shown to the people either by remission or by a reduction of the tax on the affected gardens. He suggested that the department of Agriculture might, after due investigation,

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proclaim certain quarters as affected areas, and the concession might be confined to the land-holders of such proclaimed areas only. A certain standard might be fixed in the extent of attack which would give the right to the people to apply for the concession. When a certain fraction of the assessed trees, which he would fix at one-fourth, was attacked, the owner might move for an investigation by a Board consisting of an officer from the Agricultural department, and a Revenue officer, such as the Tahsildar, and after a local inspection, the Board might report the result of their examination to the Peishkar of the division, who should have power to order a remission or a reduction of the assessment on the affected trees, according as there was a total or a partial failure of the yield, the reduction of the tax not going below one-fourth of the patta amount. The concession might be subjected to modification once in three years, after local inspection and report by the Board. Any possible confusion in the revenue accounts could be obviated by making the necessary entries regarding the remission or reduction of tax in the Tandaper accounts. In view of the large increase of revenue by the introduction of the settlement rates in the taluks now affected by the disease and considering also the promising condition of the financial future of the State, the Member prayed that the matter might receive a sympathetic consideration and favourable disposal at the hands of Government.

Dewan's reply.—The revenue settlement of a taluk, once made, should not be altered for thirty years. His Highness' Government recognise that, should an abnormal change in the conditions of a taluk take place, to such an extent as seriously to reduce the tax-paying capacity of the people, they are bound to reconsider, and if necessary to reduce, the assessments even within the settlement period of thirty years. But a reconsideration like that could not be taken up in an isolated way and with reference to individual cases. It is necessary that the conditions should have changed, and changed considerably for the worse, over a sufficiently wide area to justify the serious step of revising the settlement within the thirty years' period. The coconut blight has undoubtedly done much harm in portions of the Kottayam and Quilon divisions, but we are not certain that the evil has been of such magnitude as to require the immediate revision of the revenue settlement in any of the settled taluks. The Peishkars of the two divisions will be asked to inspect the areas affected and to report whether any of those areas is sufficiently wide to require action being taken as indicated by the Member.

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